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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implication for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/8 and Security Council resolution 1974 (2011), in which the Council requested me to report on developments in Afghanistan every three months.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report issued on 21 September 2011 (A/66/369-S/2011/590). The report also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events related to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

A. Political developments

3. The assassination on 20 September of the head of the High Peace Council, Chair of the party Jamiat-i-Islami and former President of Afghanistan, Burhanuddin Rabbani, by a suicide bomber posing as a Taliban peace envoy has had significant political and security implications. Responsibility for the assassination remains unclear, with no formal statement claiming responsibility. There have been calls, including by the National Assembly, for international cooperation in investigating the attack.

4. The culmination of a series of high-profile assassinations of figures formerly part of or close to the Northern Alliance, Mr. Rabbani's death has intensified internal political manoeuvring and weakened trust between factions and ethnic groups. Debate was sparked on key issues, such as the future of the peace process

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and the work of the High Peace Council, relations with Pakistan and the strategic partnership with the United States. Intense political posturing was also observed within Jamiat-i-Islami, a predominantly Tajik network over which Mr. Rabbani, as founder, held some influence.

5. The Head of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme, Mohammad Masoom Stanekzai, was severely wounded in the same attack but has now resumed his functions. By the end of October 2011, 2,974 reintegrees had joined the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme, with 28 provincial peace committees established. Mr. Rabbani's death, however, had a dampening effect on the wider reconciliation process.

6. From 16 to 19 November, a Traditional Loya Jirga was convened in Kabul, attended by approximately 2,000 delegates from across the country. It was initially envisioned to discuss the proposed strategic partnership between Afghanistan and the United States, but following Mr. Rabbani's death, its focus was expanded to include consideration of the future of the peace process. At the Traditional Loya Jirga, the mandate of the High Peace Council was reaffirmed and the Government was asked to appoint a new Chair. The gathering also advocated negotiations only with known and legitimate representatives of the insurgency and noted that sincere cooperation by Pakistan was needed for a peace process to succeed.

7. On 3 November, the new Rights and Justice Party was launched in Kabul. A leadership council, rather than a sole Chair, is to be at the helm, with a number of prominent politicians and civil society activists involved, including former Minister of the Interior Hanif Atmar and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commissioner Sima Samar. On 11 November, the mostly Uzbek Junbesh party entered into a new political coalition, the National Front, with the largely Hazara Hezb-e-Wahdat party, and with several influential individuals from Jamiat-i-Islami party. Jamiat-i-Islami party will decide at an upcoming party conference whether to join the new coalition.

8. The National Assembly is active again, with a quorum reached in the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of the National Assembly) on 8 October, concluding a year-long, post-electoral disagreement. Members of the Coalition for Support for the Rule of Law returned to the National Assembly after almost five weeks of boycotting parliamentary sessions. On 15 October, the Wolesi Jirga approved a $51 million supplemental budget request to recapitalize the Kabul Bank. It also confirmed the nominees for the Head of the National Directorate of Security, the Head of the Central Bank and a member of the Independent Commission for the Supervision of the Implementation of the Constitution. At least seven acting ministers and three new Supreme Court justices still need to be confirmed.

9. Prior to the convening of the Traditional Loya Jirga, there had been controversy about its legal status and whether it would meet the requirements and exercise the authority of a Loya Jirga as defined in the Constitution. Concerned that it would seek to override the authority of the Wolesi Jirga to ratify or reject international agreements, the National Assembly passed a resolution objecting to the event. President Karzai allayed such concerns in his opening address, explaining that the objective was to seek advice and that any recommendations would be duly submitted to the National Assembly for consideration and decision.

10. The Traditional Loya Jirga supported the intention of the Government to conclude a strategic partnership agreement with the United States based on full respect for the sovereignty of Afghanistan. Its recommendations also echoed President Karzai's reservations, spelled out in his opening address, against night raids and house searches by foreign troops, as well as detention centres outside of Government control. Finally, the gathering assured neighbouring countries, as the President had done, that any foreign military presence in Afghanistan would be allowed to conduct operations only within Afghanistan.

B. Security developments

11. The United Nations continued to monitor security-related events relevant to the work, mobility and safety of civilians across the country, and impacting the delivery of United Nations-mandated activities and programming. In line with seasonal trends, security-related events declined in September (1,754), October (1,509) and November 2011 (1,416), compared to the previous three-month reporting period. The incidence of events was also lower than during the same period in 2010: September (2,284; an unusually high number, partially owing to the parliamentary elections), October (1,790) and November 2010 (1,591). This quarterly trend should be placed in the context of the first 11 months, where, by the end of November, the average monthly number of security-related events for 2011 was 1,995, up 21 per cent compared to the first 11 months of 2010.

12. Armed clashes and events involving improvised explosive devices constituted the majority of such incidents, accounting for nearly 65 per cent of the total in the reporting period. The focus for military and insurgent activities shifted from the south to the south-east of the country, particularly in the provinces of the south-eastern region and Kunar Province in the eastern region. In part this was owing to disruption to insurgent activity in Helmand Province; it also partially reflected locally based insurgent initiatives in border areas.

13. There were 13 suicide attacks in September, 14 in October and 9 in November 2011, of which 9 were complex attacks. Although this is consistent with previous trends, the locations and individuals targeted generated significant publicity. Among the more notable were the attack on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Provincial Reconstruction Team in Panjshir Province, a suicide car bomb attack on ISAF in southern Kabul that killed 13 military and civilian personnel, and a complex suicide attack against an international logistic company contracted by ISAF located alongside the Herat airfield, which caused the temporary closure of the airport. These attacks were also attempts by the insurgency to demonstrate its geographical reach. On 6 December attacks in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of Afghan civilians who had gathered to mark religious ceremonies, were strongly condemned by the United Nations. Despite threats, there were few security incidents connected with the Traditional Loya Jirga: on 9 November in Paktya, an attack took place on the District Administrative Council complex where representatives were being selected; and during the gathering itself, two rockets were fired, causing minimal damage in a nearby neighbourhood and slightly injuring one person. Insurgent intimidation through the targeted assassination of high-ranking government officials, members of the security forces and influential local political and religious leaders continued, with the number of assassinations comparable to that of 2010. The focus shifted from the

southern to the south-eastern and eastern regions, which together accounted for over 65 per cent of total assassinations.

14. The most significant event directly impacting United Nations staff was a complex attack carried out in Kandahar on 31 October, in which three United Nations national staff members were killed and two were injured at the compound of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. No other staff members were killed or injured as a result of their work for the organization. However, one national staff member was briefly abducted by insurgents and released unharmed. Nevertheless, the operational environment for humanitarian and development work remained volatile and United Nations national staff and staff working for non-governmental organizations continued to suffer sporadic intimidation from insurgent and criminal elements.

15. After careful consultation with subnational authorities and on the basis of recommendations by the Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board, President Karzai approved, with one addition, the list of areas slated for the second phase of transition of security responsibilities to Afghan control, at a National Security Council meeting on 27 November. It is estimated that, once this phase is completed, over half of the population of Afghanistan will live in areas undergoing transition. During the reporting period, no significant deterioration in public order occurred in the areas handed over to Afghan security responsibility as part of the first phase of transition, which began in July 2011. Security incidents in those areas did not show a marked difference from seasonal trends. The Afghan National Security Forces reportedly increased both the number and the level of operations, some of which were conducted unaided, although logistical support by international forces remains an important element in these efforts.

16. At the meeting of the Joint Afghan-NATO Inteqal Board on 29 October, the Chair of the Transition Coordination Commission noted that commitments made at the Lisbon Conference were still on track: the phased military withdrawal had begun; the Kabul Process was reinvigorated; and preparations for strategic partnerships were well under way. It is now also broadly acknowledged by the international community that gains in security could be undermined by weak socio-economic development and governance, and that, consequently, there is a need for a balanced approach to security and non-security considerations. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has continued to play an advocacy and facilitation role in promoting and encouraging coherence between ISAF, donors and the Government of Afghanistan in ensuring the centrality of governance, the rule of law and development as integral elements to an enduring security transition.

17. UNAMA also continued to monitor and provide advice on community-based security initiatives, including the Afghan Local Police, the Critical Infrastructure Protection Programme and other local defence initiatives, which continue to grow. The Afghan Local Police now numbers more than 9,000 in 56 sites sanctioned by the Ministry of the Interior. While these local defence forces have contributed to stability in some areas, the programme remains controversial, given possible fallout linked to issues of human rights abuses and decrease in civilian protection, impunity, vetting, command and control, and the potential re-emergence of ethnically or politically biased militias. UNAMA has engaged with the relevant

authorities on these concerns and on specific allegations, and was advised that efforts to provide strict oversight would be increased.

18. The process of disbanding private security companies and replacing them with a Government-controlled Afghan public protection force is ongoing. A six-month review found a number of issues related to capacity, particularly in terms of managing large-scale security projects in a fiscally and legally competent manner. The Ministry of the Interior has now created a new deputy ministerial position for the Afghan public protection force and, in conjunction with ISAF and international donor support, a special task force will aim at setting up the initiative fully by March 2012, the proposed date for the dissolution of private security companies. The creation of the Afghan public protection force is another indication that the Government of Afghanistan is taking responsibility for security leadership. Due attention needs to be given to ensuring that the replacement of private security companies by the Afghan public protection force does not adversely impact development and aid projects across Afghanistan.

19. On 30 November, members of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board maintained the agreement reached at the Security Standing Committee of 28 June to an increase in the number of the Afghan National Police from 134,000 to 157,000 and the Afghan National Army from 171,600 to 195,000. The related agreement on accelerated efforts to professionalize the police force and on institutional and administrative reforms to the Ministry of the Interior was also maintained.

C. Regional cooperation

20. The Government of Afghanistan continued to strengthen dialogue and cooperation with neighbouring countries and the broader region amid greater interest by regional and international actors on enhancing regional cooperation. The Istanbul Conference for Afghanistan: Security and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia, chaired by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Ludin with facilitation by Turkey and UNAMA, was held on 2 November, following preparatory meetings in Oslo on 9 October and in Kabul on 22 October. At the Conference the Istanbul Process on Regional Security and Cooperation for a Secure and Stable Afghanistan was adopted by 14 participating countries — neighbours, near neighbours and countries in the region — and welcomed and supported by 22 other countries, institutions and organizations present as observers. The Istanbul Process reaffirms general principles of regional cooperation, but also includes a list of specific confidence-building measures for consideration by the countries of the region. The Government of Afghanistan was requested to circulate a concept paper in January 2012 outlining the agenda for a follow-up ministerial-level conference to be held in Kabul in June 2012. It was also asked to chair a preparatory meeting at the technical level in advance of the June conference.

21. Speculation on the responsibility for the death of Mr. Rabbani had a negative impact on Afghanistan-Pakistan relations. A trilateral meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey, held on 1 November, preceding the Istanbul Conference, went some way in addressing the concerns of and rebuilding relations between the two neighbours. It was, among other things, agreed that Afghanistan and Pakistan would establish a mechanism to cooperate in the investigation of Mr. Rabbani's murder.

22. In preparation of an upcoming trilateral summit between the Presidents of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in Islamabad, the Deputy Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the three countries met in Tehran on 16 October 2011. The tenth meeting of the Council of Heads of Government of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member States took place in Saint Petersburg on 7 November 2011. The meeting also included delegations from Afghanistan, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan as observing countries. Positive outcomes included Russia's commitment of $500 million for the Central Asia-South Asia Electricity Trade and Transmission Project, connecting power lines in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

23. On 4 October, President Karzai signed a partnership agreement between Afghanistan and India. The agreement covers political and security cooperation, trade and economic cooperation, capacity development and education, as well as social, cultural and civil society relations. It will be implemented under the framework of a Partnership Council, to be headed by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of both countries, which will convene annually.

24. The Afghanistan-Tajikistan "energy bridge" was inaugurated on 27 October. This involves an electric transmission line connecting the Sangtuda hydroelectric power plant in Tajikistan to Baghlan, in Afghanistan. According to the agreement the transmission line will supply electricity to the northern provinces in Afghanistan until 2015. On 29 September, the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industries and the Kazakhstan Ministry of Emergency Situations signed an agreement on expanding trade ties between the two countries.

25. Between 21 and 25 October, the Minister of Counter-Narcotics of Afghanistan and the Country Representative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) visited Turkmenistan and Tajikistan to foster greater regional cooperation on counter-narcotics within the framework of the new UNODC regional programme for Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries.

26. On 15 November, the International Contact Group met in Astana, to shape the agenda for the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn on the basis of an Afghan vision. On 5 December, in Bonn, the Conference reaffirmed the commitment of the international community to support Afghanistan through transition and the 2015-2024 Transformation Decade, including on economic development and on a peace and reconciliation process in line with agreed principles. Both Afghanistan and the international community agreed to work together to reinvigorate the Kabul Process and their respective commitments for more on-budget international aid and greater Afghan transparency and anti-corruption efforts. The Conference was preceded on 3 December by a civil society meeting, which reaffirmed the centrality of the human rights and fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Afghan Constitution.

III. Human rights

27. The protection of civilians remained a major concern throughout the country. From late August to the end of November, UNAMA documented 795 civilian deaths and 1,083 civilian injuries. While the number of civilians injured decreased by 19 per cent, compared to the same three-month period in 2010, the total number of civilian deaths increased by 5 per cent during the reporting period. Anti-Government

elements caused 1,432 civilian casualties (609 civilian deaths and 823 civilian injuries), representing 77 per cent of all civilian deaths for the reporting period, an increase of 7 per cent compared to the number of civilians killed by anti-Government elements during the same period in 2010. Pro-Government forces caused 203 civilian casualties (83 deaths and 120 injuries, or 10 per cent of the total number of civilian deaths during the reporting period). This represents a decrease of 25 per cent of civilian deaths attributed to pro-Government forces, in comparison to the same period in 2010; 13 per cent of civilian deaths could not be attributed to any party to the conflict.

28. The majority of civilian deaths were attributed to the continued use of improvised explosive devices and targeted killings by anti-Government elements. Improvised explosive device attacks were the single greatest contributor to civilian deaths responsible for 296 civilians killed, 37 per cent of all civilian deaths. The number of civilians killed by improvised explosive devices increased by 4 per cent, compared to the same period in 2010. Targeted killings of Government officials and persons with actual or perceived ties to the Government of Afghanistan or ISAF occurred throughout the country, with 180 deaths, an increase of 34 per cent, compared to the same period in 2010. Suicide attacks resulting in civilian casualties increased by 13 per cent, compared with the same period last year. Civilian casualties as a result of air strikes decreased 26 per cent, compared with the same three-month period in 2010, while civilian casualties from night search operations during the reporting period increased to 10 (8 killed and 2 injured), as compared with four civilian casualties (1 person killed and 3 injured) during the same period in 2010.

29. On 10 October, UNAMA publicly released a report entitled "Treatment of Conflict-Related Detainees in Afghan Custody". Based on extensive interviews conducted from October 2010 to August 2011 with 379 detainees at 47 facilities in 22 provinces, the report documented the use of interrogation techniques that constituted torture and other forms of mistreatment. Some individuals were detained by both the National Directorate of Security and the Afghan National Police. Almost half (46 per cent) of the 273 conflict-related detainees held by the National Directorate of Security who UNAMA interviewed experienced torture, and 35 per cent of the 117 individuals detained by the Afghan National Police suffered similar treatment. While UNAMA did not find that torture was a Government or institutional policy, it found compelling evidence that torture occurred systematically in five facilities of the National Directorate of Security and in several facilities of the Afghan National Police. The National Directorate of Security and the Afghan National Police provided UNAMA with access to their facilities throughout the observation period and initiated a plan of remedial measures to address the findings of the report. ISAF immediately suspended detainee transfers to 16 detention facilities that UNAMA had identified as locations where torture occurred and announced a remediation plan of inspection, human rights training, monitoring and supporting Government accountability actions.

30. In an effort to promote an inclusive peace and reconciliation process, UNAMA facilitated the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, comprising 12 civil society organizations and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. The initiative conducted more than 65 focus groups with approximately 1,500 Afghans from all walks of life throughout the country, who discussed their views on peace, security, transition, the rule of law, impunity and the role of the international community. As outlined in the report of the Steering Committee on the dialogue

events, which was prepared in late November and distributed at the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn, participants highlighted that corruption is pervasive, affecting nearly every aspect of their lives, leading to insecurity, lack of economic development and opportunity and violations of their rights. They also noted that the international military presence and international development assistance should play a role in addressing corruption as an urgent priority. Participants stressed the need for neutral interlocutors to assist in peace negotiations between the Government and insurgents.

31. On 23 November, UNAMA released the report, "A Long Way to Go", documenting the criminal justice system's implementation of the 2009 Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Examining the performance of judges, prosecutors and police throughout Afghanistan from March 2010 to August 2011, UNAMA found some progress in the application of the law. However, the use of the law represented a very small percentage of the Government's handling of cases of violence against women. The report found that most cases, including serious cases of murder and rape, were still mediated through a variety of mechanisms, rather than prosecuted as required by the law. In this context, the United Nations Gender Working Group developed joint messages to promote gender equity in Afghanistan, particularly in view of transition. Afghan women's civil society and advocacy groups and the United Nations carried these messages to the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn in order to highlight the continued need to support women's rights and empowerment in Afghanistan.

32. The United Nations-led country task force on children and armed conflict continued to support the Government of Afghanistan in the implementation of the action plan, signed in February 2011, on the prevention of child recruitment and to monitor grave violations against children committed by parties to the conflict. During the reporting period, the most frequent violations continued to be recruitment and use of children, including for suicide bombing missions or for planting explosives — with a recent rise in reported cross-border recruitment by Taliban — as well as attacks on schools. The killing and maiming of children remains of grave concern, especially in the light of a notable increase in incidents injuring or killing children.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul Process and aid coherence

33. During the reporting period, the Kabul Process and its supporting architecture in the form of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board regained prominence. As follow-on to the June/July 2011 Standing Committees, and after an 11-month hiatus due to the issues surrounding the Kabul Bank situation, a meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board was held on 19 October. On 15 October, parliamentary approval of the supplementary budget to recapitalize the Kabul Bank fulfilled the central precondition for the approval of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) country programme; this, in turn, opened the space for re-engagement, through the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, between the Government of Afghanistan, UNAMA and the international community.

34. At the 19 October meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, three key principles of engagement were agreed to in addition to the endorsement of seven national priority programmes: (i) centrality and sustainability of the Kabul Process linked to the process of transition; (ii) mutual accountability; and

(iii) improved efficiency of the use of development resources supporting the Afghan Government's development and governance priorities defined by national priority programmes.

35. On 14 November, the IMF Executive Board and the Government of Afghanistan successfully concluded negotiations on a three-year IMF programme for Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan firmly committed to an aggressive programme of efficiency and reform with a focus on increasing domestic revenue collection, strengthening the financial sector, and implementing a progressive pro-poor taxation regime. The resolution of these negotiations, which had overshadowed the governance and development agenda since September 2010, allowed for re-engagement of on-budget funding modalities such as the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund and the formal re-engagement of the international community in the Kabul Process through the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board.

36. A second series of Standing Committees were held on 26 and 27 November on governance and socio-economic development, followed by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting on 30 November. The Standing Committees provided an opportunity for frank exchange during which the Government and the international community agreed to refocus discussions on ensuring sound finance mechanisms for realizing government priorities via national priority programmes. Two additional national priority programmes were then endorsed by the Board, bringing the total number to 11 of 22 national programmes endorsed in principle at the 2010 Kabul Conference.

37. The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board endorsed in principle the process put forward in a paper by the Government of Afghanistan to address the fiscal gap that the country will face following transition. It combines commitments made to IMF with renewed commitments to encourage economic growth, human development and public service delivery. The paper, entitled "Towards a Self-Sustaining Afghanistan", informed discussions between the Government and the international community at the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn. Donors also agreed to work with the Government through the Kabul Process to implement the national priority programmes in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner.

V. Governance and rule of law

38. Government efforts continued to address the limited presence of justice sector officials at the district level due to security concerns, poor infrastructure and low salaries. Of symbolic significance was the convening of the second general assembly of the Afghan Independent Bar Association. Founded in 2008, it has seen a threefold increase in members, from 400 to almost 1,200 at present. While there is room for development, recognition of the role and the importance of an independent legal profession is growing among law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and the courts.

39. In an effort to support the Independent Directorate of Local Governance and coordinate international assistance for more effective provincial councils pursuing good governance principles, UNAMA conducted a study on the strengths and weaknesses of the councils. The study, produced in October, provided policy

recommendations to the Independent Directorate of Local Governance and relevant stakeholders to promote a more effective, inclusive and transparent system of representative governance, including (i) a renewed emphasis on respect for established rules and procedures; (ii) a revision of the existing Provincial Council Law and Rules of Procedure to further define roles and responsibilities; (iii) increased financial support; (iv) continued capacity development; and (v) consideration of amendments to relevant legislation to promote better representation of all districts and communities.

40. UNAMA continued to coordinate financial and technical support to the new government-led provincial budgeting process, a pilot initiative outlining mechanisms for the delegation of financial and procurement authorities from the central government to the provinces. Once implemented, the mechanism could help promote a more effective, transparent and efficient financial reporting system, addressing key provisions of the subnational governance policy.

41. Furthermore, the United Nations-supported Afghanistan subnational governance programme established letters of agreements facilitating the deployment of technical expertise and the procurement of services and goods to directorates of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, 32 provincial governors' offices, provincial councils and municipalities. These letters of agreement are an important step towards establishing mechanisms for financial de-concentration of authority to the subnational level.

42. The Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee carried out its third two-week visit to Afghanistan since its inauguration in May 2011. It has finalized 31 recommendations for Government ministries and the international community to fight corruption at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. It now intends to discuss the implementation of these recommendations with the President, Government ministries, donors, and civil society, and is expected to produce a public report on implementation progress.

VI. Development and humanitarian assistance

43. On 16 October, the Central Statistics Organization, with United Nations technical support, presented the first provincial socio-demographic and economic survey and extensive listing of establishments, institutions and households in Bamyan. The survey provides critical data for development planning, policymaking and public administration. Covering 35,000 to 40,000 households, it is the largest and most comprehensive socio-economic survey to date in Afghanistan, providing data down to the district level. The Central Statistics Organization intends to replicate this survey in the remaining 33 provinces of Afghanistan between 2012 and 2014 in order to provide robust national and subnational data. To accomplish that, an additional $96 million in funding will be required.

44. To help guide discussions over the next 6 to 12 months in preparation for the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) midterm review and the 2014-2018 UNDAF, the current set of priorities will see the addition of seven new areas. Keeping in mind the need for coherence with Afghan Government national priority programmes, the additional priority areas are (i) capacity development; (ii) youth; (iii) urban development; (iv) population issues;

(v) reintegration of returnees; (vi) natural resource management; and (vii) essential data required to clearly indicate progress towards development results.

45. Limited snow and rainfall during the past winter and spring caused a slow-onset drought. That impacted the food security, nutrition, health and access to water of an estimated 3 million people in 14 provinces in the north, north-east and west of the country in mid-2011. The humanitarian community is working to respond to the needs arising from this emergency with the drought coordination cell established by the Government of Afghanistan under the leadership of the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, Mohammed Asef Rahimi. A Consolidated Appeal for Afghanistan launch on 1 October in Kabul, and officiated by Vice-President Khalili, increased the Appeal from $453 million to $582 million. The Appeal is currently 59 per cent funded. The food security cluster, under the co-leadership of the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, prepared a detailed response to address the drought in the affected provinces through September 2012, through the distribution of animal feed and seeds, food assistance, and food and cash for work programmes.

46. As part of the water, sanitation and hygiene response in the north, north-east and central regions, safe drinking water was provided by the United Nations through emergency water tankering and the rehabilitation of water sources, benefiting an estimated 1 million people. As at the end of October 2011, the severe acute malnutrition programme had admitted and provided treatment to 31,385 severe acutely malnourished children, nearly double the 16,700 cases recorded in 2010.

47. The United Nations has estimated that, as at the end of September 2011, there were some 450,000 conflict-induced internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan. Since the previous report, continued conflict between the Government, NATO/ISAF and anti-Government elements has resulted in the estimated displacement of some 162,000 people between January and October 2011, a 51 per cent increase over the same period last year. A key challenge has been the spread of dry conditions and drought across much of the northern and western regions of Afghanistan, including to places of origin of IDPs. This has resulted in further vulnerabilities and displacements.

48. The Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan, with the support of the United Nations, continued its stepped-up efforts to eradicate polio, focusing particularly on the southern region, where the majority of cases were reported. The country as a whole is experiencing an outbreak of wild polio viruses, with 58 cases reported to date in 2011, up from 20 in 2010. An additional round of targeted polio vaccinations in a number of high-risk districts was undertaken by the United Nations at the end of November. The United Nations also provided essential medicines to provincial health directorates in order to boost emergency preparedness and emergency medical supplies in order to support the response to large-scale disease outbreaks of measles, cholera and typhoid fever, exceeding local response capacities.

49. The United Nations supported the finalization of the Afghanistan reproductive health strategy and action plan, and the development of the first national policy and strategy of nursing and midwifery services. The National Maternal and Child Survival Committee and eight provincial committees were established to support implementation. Recognizing that health is a human right, the United Nations supported the development of the initial draft of the Ministry of Public Health's health and human rights policy.

50. As literacy and women's empowerment are critical areas in Afghanistan, the United Nations supported over 322 women's literacy centres in Daikundi and Badakshan, two provinces targeted for maternal and newborn health initiatives, during the reporting period. Further, in September, a budget of $55.7 million was approved for Afghanistan under the Global Partnership for Education Programme. The programme, spanning three years, aims to increase equitable access to education, specifically for girls, in 55 districts of 13 provinces with low education and security indicators.

VII. Counter-narcotics

51. The Afghan Opium Survey 2011, conducted by the Afghan Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and UNODC and released on 11 October, showed that, because of insecurity and high prices, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan reached 131,000 hectares, 7 per cent higher than in 2010. Seventy-eight per cent of cultivation was concentrated in Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Daikundi and Zabul Provinces in the south, and 17 per cent in Farah, Badghis and Nimroz Provinces in the west. These are among the most insecure provinces in the country. However, the insurgency is not the main driver behind cultivation: most of the profits from opium are made by other segments of the society, including corrupt officials, landowners and criminals. The potential production in 2011 is expected to reach 5,800 tons, up 61 per cent from 3,600 tons produced in 2010. Dry opium prices increased by 43 per cent, compared with 2010; and the total farm gate value of opium production is set to increase by 133 per cent, from $605 million in 2010 to $1.4 billion in 2011.

52. The Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan, which had been expected to be downgraded to a regular police force, remained as a stand-alone department within the Ministry of the Interior, headed by the Deputy Minister of Counter-Narcotics. The Ministry and supporting law enforcement agencies (Ministry of the Interior, the National Directorate of Security, the Combined Joint Task Force) launched a new initiative aimed at sanctioning owners and lessees as foreseen by the law on campaigning against intoxicants and drugs and on their control. The initiative aimed to inform and warn the population about the provision of the counter-narcotics law, according to which land under poppy cultivation will be subject to forced eradication, while the landowners will face prosecution.

53. Counter-narcotics ministers from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan met on 28 November in Kabul to enhance responses to regional security challenges under the Triangular Initiative framework brokered by UNODC. Since its launch in 2007, the Initiative, has promoted information exchange and intelligence-led operations targeting the major transnational networks, while building confidence. Since 2009, 12 drug control operations coordinated by the joint planning cell have resulted in the seizures of several tons of illicit drugs and the arrest of many drug traffickers. The ministerial declaration signed by the three countries further strengthened this cooperation. In addition, the ministers identified emerging threats in the region, including maritime trafficking and money-laundering, which will be addressed in future Triangular Initiative operations. UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov attended the meeting, which coincided with his visit to Kabul from 27 to 29 November.

VIII. Mission support

54. Security enhancement works in line with the revised minimum operating security standards were continued in field offices throughout the country. In the current adverse security-related operating environment in the Mission, we are not yet able to forecast an end date for this work. The security situation continues to evolve and the Mission continues to take additional risk mitigation measures. However, save for additional upgrades, at present it is not foreseen that 2012 will require any major new projects.

55. All regional headquarters remained operational. Substantial progress was made in the construction of the new regional compound in Mazar-i-Sharif and the new Kandahar regional compound is nearing completion. As anticipated in the previous report (A/66/369-S/2011/590), staff returned to most provincial offices upon completion of the additional security enhancement works required under the updated minimum operating security standards.

56. The overall vacancy rate as at October 2011 was 18 per cent for international staff and 9 per cent for national staff. The UNAMA budget proposal for 2012, which amounts to $241.5 million (compared to $270.7 million in 2011), maintaining the current level of UNAMA outreach and activities, is currently under review by the United Nations legislative bodies.

IX. Observations

57. Developments of the last few months, including the assassination of Mr. Rabbani in early September, ongoing regional anxieties and roiling global economic crisis, have pointed to the need for greater predictability in the country's transition. In this regard, it is critical that Afghanistan, with the support of its partners and the United Nations on the ground, make a concerted effort to forge a national consensus on key issues. This includes involving civil society in a broad-based dialogue aimed at advancing the peace process and reinforcing the country's institutions; sustaining the momentum of the regional process agreed to in Istanbul; ensuring a unified, predictable, transparent and well-resourced economic and development agenda, through an invigorated Kabul Process; and buttressing its key partnerships for the long term, beyond 2014.

58. Mr. Rabbani's killing was a setback, but it should not and cannot deter efforts towards Afghan-led reconciliation. Rather it should provide an opportunity for all Afghans to come together in a moment of national unity to make a renewed commitment to peace through dialogue. Redoubled efforts are required to address the trust deficit, build mutual confidence and advance a comprehensive and inclusive peace process. It is essential that all sides, including the insurgency, commit to peaceful engagement in the dialogue process and to undertake preventive measures against actions that may undermine the process. A proper investigation of the assassination would help restore confidence and prevent any further loss of momentum. The Loya Jirga marked a first step towards continued dialogue by reaffirming the support for negotiations. I assure the President of Afghanistan, the High Peace Council and Minister Stanekzai of my full support as they continue to lead this important effort.

59. The Istanbul Conference presented a clear vision and commitment to work in a results-oriented process towards greater stability and prosperity in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole. The Istanbul Process provides a basis for regional actors to move forward, in a structured manner with articulated tools and clear principles, towards strengthened regional cooperation on a range of issues, including security. It is now up to the members of the region to demonstrate their commitment to the Process and its objectives by ensuring that it (i) moves forward constructively and pragmatically; and (ii) remains regionally owned but with international supporters. Given the inclusion of counter-narcotics in the confidence-building measures, I encourage the donor community to mainstream counter-narcotics within national priority programmes, developing concrete indicators and providing sufficiently funded budgets.

60. The need for Afghanistan and Pakistan to strengthen their bilateral relations remains paramount in furthering peace, reconciliation and stability. The trilateral meeting between Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey was the latest positive step in this regard. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Commission on Reconciliation and Peace is a useful vehicle for pursuing a structured dialogue on relevant critical issues of mutual interest. I encourage Afghanistan and Pakistan to continue utilizing such mechanisms with a view to addressing and resolving issues of mutual concern.

61. The protection of civilians remains a critical and pressing concern of both Afghans and the international community. Regrettably, civilian casualties remained at high levels during the reporting period. Anti-government elements continued their indiscriminate use of pressure-plate improvised explosive devices and assassinations, which killed more civilians than any other means. Although there remains a long way to go, the Government has increasingly acknowledged the need to take serious measures to ensure adequate protection for women and detainees, including by observing basic legal protections and enforcing institutional accountability.

62. Efforts made to improve security need to be matched by bettering the living conditions of the Afghan people. The Human Development Index report illustrates that progress is being made by the Government together with the international community in improving socio-economic conditions, many of which stagnated during the civil war period of the 1990s. Yet the Index also points to the challenges that remain in regard to poverty and social inequalities. Here, complacency is not an option. The long-term challenges of balancing the economic dimensions of the security transition within the broader Kabul Process must be linked to the delivery of real and tangible improvements in the lives of ordinary Afghan citizens. For example, investments in promoting literacy and equal access to education will contribute to helping to unlock the economic potential of the country and to attaining the Millennium Development Goals. International partners are increasingly aware that improvements in governance, socio-economic development and the rule of law are inextricably linked to a successful and irreversible security transition. With an expected decline of resources in support of the governance and development agenda, effective leveraging, coordination and use of financing becomes increasingly critical. Thus, more attention will need to be given to balancing security and non-security investments in the medium to long term. The International Conference on Afghanistan, held in Bonn in 2011, set forth a road map to engage in these discussions.

63. The Bonn Conference reaffirmed the long-term commitment of the international community in support of Afghanistan beyond 2014. Shifting strategy from stabilization to long-term development cooperation, participants recommitted to aligning assistance with Government priorities and to improving efficiency of aid resources, including through the channelling of a growing share of aid through the Government budget. Partners insisted upon continued reforms in the governance and anti-corruption sector so as to ensure the transparent and accountable use of resources. While Afghan line ministries have made some progress towards vertical integration, further work is required in linking planning and activities at the subnational level (particularly in view of the evolution of the Provincial Reconstruction Team) to those developed through national priority programmes. The United Nations will continue to support efforts towards development coherence both in Kabul and at the subnational level under the guidance and leadership of the Government of Afghanistan and with the support and active engagement of international partners.

64. Afghanistan's transition is inextricably linked to those strategic partnerships that commit to the country's future beyond 2014. Until such agreements become more tangible in their assurances, the security transition process will move along at a quick pace, but with uncertain long-term development commitments for the Afghan people. Of particular importance are those "guarantees" that fund the Government's key Afghan national development programmes, both security and non-security, as well as proven activities and programmes.

65. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the more immediate humanitarian concerns that many Afghans face on a daily basis. I encourage continued cooperation both within Afghanistan and the region to promote sustainable and durable solutions to the country's displaced. Given the nearly 3 million Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries and the more than 5.7 million returnees, the United Nations, with the Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, is planning an international conference in the spring of 2012, which will aim to explore a comprehensive, multi-year strategy for this long-standing issue. I fully support this initiative and anticipate concrete, substantive outcomes that can offer real solutions to the large number of still-displaced Afghans.

66. Throughout 2011, the Government has provided leadership in addressing numerous humanitarian issues, most notably the response to the ongoing drought. The 2012 Afghanistan Consolidated Appeal launched by the Emergency Relief Coordinator calls attention to immediate humanitarian needs and to the need to ensure continuity and coherence between the developmental and humanitarian interventions in support of the efforts of the Government. However, its goals can only be met if the right to assistance for those in need and access to them is forthcoming. Following the tragic loss of staff working for the Office of the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees in Kandahar on 31 October and the routine intimidation and threats received by humanitarian workers, I again call upon all parties in the conflict to respect the impartiality and the neutrality of humanitarian actors and the right of the most vulnerable communities to receive assistance.

67. The United Nations in Afghanistan has been contributing to Afghan and international efforts by supporting the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict, protecting human rights and encouraging coherent and effective support for various governance, development and humanitarian challenges. I wish to underscore the

importance of ensuring the security and the safety of United Nations staff as the Organization remains a committed partner to the Government and people of Afghanistan.

68. We have now moved into a new phase of long-term engagement, support and partnership between the international community and Afghanistan. Clearly, as Afghanistan makes progress towards peace and improved governance, the role of the United Nations will continue to be assessed.

69. The new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Jan Kubis, will assume his duties on 16 January 2012. In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Special Representative Staffan de Mistura for his service. His efforts have ensured that the United Nations has joined with the Government of Afghanistan and the international community in supporting the realization of a modern, democratic and sovereign State. Throughout his career with the United Nations, Mr. de Mistura has championed the values and the principles that we collectively embody. I would also like to thank the United Nations staff for their commitment and dedication to enacting these same values and principles on a daily basis despite the risks they face. In doing so, they make sure we deliver on our commitments to the people of Afghanistan.